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HONORE MENCIER
—AVOCAT—
1592 NOTRE-DAME,
MONTREAL

THE CANADIAN CONTINGENT.

**An Extract from a Speech by the Hon. Minister of Railways,
at Campbellton, N. B., on 21st Nov., 1899.**

"Before sitting down I wish to say a few words upon one matter with which Mr. Lemieux has, however, already dealt. I refer to what I may characterize as the hysterical agitation which has been raised by the opposition on the subject of our sending a contingent to the Transvaal. My honorable friend is a representative of one of the leading constituencies of the province of Quebec, and is a resident of Montreal. He has not been saying to you tonight what he would not say at home. In fact, he has only repeated a speech already published in the press. He has given you his honest convictions on the subject, and knows whereof he speaks. I regret that circumstances have arisen which make it necessary for me tonight, and which made it necessary for my friend, to bring up a subject of this character. I regret it, because I think the fact it has become necessary is not a favorable omen, or a sign of hope, as respects the future of Canada. (Applause.) I charge against the Conservative party that the whole of this agitation is the outgrowth of political design. My explanation of it is that the Conservative leaders, realizing that before many months there must be an appeal to the electors of Canada; and seeing that they would be confronted by a party which had a strong hold upon the confidence and good will of the people; that the result of the appeal would be the return of the Liberal party to power with probably an increased majority; felt they must make a showing upon some other ground and raise some other cry than any they had yet succeeded in raising. Well, what occurred? Let us trace the history of this matter. Sir Charles Tupper had barely landed in Canada from England during the present fall before he took occasion to declare, in a speech at Halifax,

that it was the duty of the government at once to raise a contingent and send it to the Transvaal to fight in the impending struggle. War had not at that time been declared. There was no doubt a fear among many that the negotiations which were then going on between the home government and the republic in South Africa might eventuate in trouble. But before the prospect of peace was entirely abandoned Sir Charles Tupper began shouting out his demand upon the government to raise a contingent for the war. We have had the statement of the British premier and the colonial secretary that neither of them felt that the prospect of peace was hopeless. On the contrary, they had very great confidence that there would not be a recourse to arms; but Sir Charles apparently would have the contingent go whether there was to be a war or not.

"I charge against Sir Charles Tupper and his party friends that they were then flying a political kite. It was not with the leader of the opposition a question as to how he could, as leader of his party, best contribute to bring about united and sympathetic action in aid of British interests on the part of the whole people of Canada. It is apparent, it seems to me, that such was not his chief desire. If it had been, I maintain he would have acted differently. He would have communicated to the premier of the government, instead of any platform announcement such as he did make, an ardent assurance that he was prepared, as leader of the opposition, to render any assistance in his power to the government, if they concluded upon a policy looking to the giving of aid to the imperial authorities should the emergency arise. (Hear, hear and applause.) That is what he would have done if patriotic considerations had been uppermost in his mind.

That is what he would have done if it had been his sole desire that the mother country should have the assistance of Canada in any struggle which might ensue. But he took the opposite course. He took the course, I will not say of a political trickster—that might perhaps be considered an offensive word—but he took the course of a political manoeuvrer. He wanted the people to think that he was in advance of the government; that he had raised the country, and forced the government to act, probably against its inclination; that he was first in the field to give his valuable assistance to the Empire in the impending crisis. (Cheers). There were two courses which Canada might under such circumstances take. There was involved in the proposition as it came from Sir Charles Tupper, the idea that we should at once raise a contingent of say a thousand men, and send them out to South Africa under conditions which carried with it their maintenance during the continuation of the war, whether that period should be short or long. In other words, he proposed that we should go to war with the Transvaal.

"You will say with me at once that this was a very grave and momentous proposition. You will say that it was a marked departure from any action which had previously been taken by any government in Canada. You will admit now in your calm moments, as the people of Canada generally will admit, that it was a question which, while it had to be dealt with in some form or other promptly—I will admit, if you like, that it had to be dealt with instantly—yet that it must be given due and proper consideration.

"Sir Charles is an old and experienced Parliamentarian. He is an old and experienced minister of the crown. He knows the vast distinction there is between what the leader of the opposition may say, and what the government may say and do. The leader of the opposition has no responsibilities, at least none worthy of the name. The government must always assume the whole of the responsibility for any thing it does. No government could justify itself before the people of the country for any measure, for any departure from constitutional usage and practice, by pleading that the leader of the opposition had desired or favored such action.

"Let it also be borne in mind that

while Sir Charles from Halifax and other points of vantage, and his newspaper press in all parts of Canada, were shouting with hysterical fervor—although moved, I am free to admit as to a portion of the press, by a very laudable feeling of loyalty and deep seated concern for British interests—for the government to send out an armed force, and pledge Canada, purely by the action of the government itself, to carry the burden and responsibility of such action; while all this was going on, communications were passing on this subject between the government of the dominion and the colonial office. (Cheers.) The government of Canada had not been and was not asleep. We were deeply interested in the welfare of the Outlanders, in the maintainance of British power and authority in South Africa, and in sustaining the paramountcy of British rule.

"The proof of this lies in the fact, if any proof were wanting, that a resolution had been introduced in the house of commons by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and carried, during the very last session, in which parliament declared in unmistakable terms its sympathy with the Outlanders in the harsh treatment they had received at the hands of the Boer republic, and in the deprivation of the civil and religious rights of our own people in that country. In adopting that resolution, there were none, I think, who did not consider that it involved an expression, at least, of willingness on the part of Canada to aid the empire should the need for our assistance arise.

"It was quite open to the imperial government to say whether or not they would accept our assistance, and if so, what form it should take. The evidence, if it is not already available, will be available, will show that the Canadian government was prepared to act in any stress of circumstances which might arise. It was apparent, although not to the gentlemen who were shouting from the outside, not to Sir Charles Tupper, who did not know what was transpiring, but desired only to be recognized as first in the field with his powerful influence, that what the imperial government above all things wished was united action on the part of all the colonies of the crown. In due time the imperial authorities made known their views.

"But while everyone was awaiting the outcome of the efforts of the colonial sec-

retary to avert the horrors of war, what was taking place in Canada? I have pointed to the action of the leader of the opposition. Let me point to the action of his press. Did you read the *Star* of Montreal, the *Mail* and *Empire* of Toronto, and all the lesser lights which reflected the views of the party in opposition? Did you observe the wild and hysterical cries to which they gave utterance? In the light of these clamorous demands, would you have imagined that Canada was governed under a system of responsible government? It seems to me you would have rather thought, if you were to accept the utterances of this portion of the press as indicative of the general judgment of the people of Canada, that hysteria was one of our leading characteristics. (Cheers.) Without summoning parliament, without knowing whether the great council of the nation would sanction the action proposed, these agitators would have had us commit ourselves to what might be fairly called a declaration of war against the Transvaal. (Hear, hear and applause.)

"Surely this was an alarming departure from anything that parliament could have contemplated when it adopted the resolution of sympathy with the Outlanders, to which I have alluded. If a request had come from the imperial government of the character which was contemplated by our critics, and which we were called upon to take by the leader of the opposition and his party, what would the imperial government have thought proper action on our part? And what should we have considered proper action on our own part? I think the imperial government would have anticipated that we would immediately summon parliament and obtain the necessary authority to spend public money for this purpose.

"The imperial government held that view of their own duty, for they lost no time in summoning parliament to ask for authority to carry on the war. Parliament met on the 17th October last, shortly after the Boer ultimatum had been received.

"The proposition, however, which was suggested by the imperial government as the one which they were making to the other colonies which had signified their willingness to co-operate, was a very different thing from that which I have been discussing

"Their proposition, as everyone now

knows, was that we should take charge of the organization of a volunteer force; that we should equip it and maintain it until it reached a South African port. That was the extent and measure of our responsibility in the matter. From that time forward the contingent we would send was to be enrolled as part of the British army, and to be sustained out of the imperial exchequer.

"But this, let me reaffirm the statement, was not the proposition which had been so tumultuously clamored for by a certain section of our people, nor was it the proposition which the premier had before him when he gave the interview which appeared in the *Toronto Globe*. Let this distinction, for it is a very marked and vastly important distinction, be constantly borne in mind.

"The premier applied his mind and judgment to the first idea which had been presented to him, and which had to be considered before the modified view, approved and concurred in by the imperial authorities and by the other colonies of the crown, had been suggested. It was a totally different thing from the course we were being urged to take by these frenzied political agitators. It would involve but a moderate cost, so moderate that the government had no hesitation, having given to the question in that form its most serious consideration, as it was bound to do, and having taken no more time than necessary for that purpose, in deciding to adopt it.

"The government felt, upon a survey of the whole situation, and the need for immediate action, that the country would approve; that it was leading thus far towards realizing the imperial sentiment of the country, and evidencing to Europe that the subjects of Britain were prepared to demonstrate their unity with the empire. (Cheers).

"I think, Mr. Chairman, the fact that we had the contingent ready before the date indicated by the colonial secretary on which he desired it should sail, sufficiently disposes of any criticism as to delay on the part of the government. No reasonable man can say that the circumstances afforded evidence of reluctance, unwillingness or indifference on our part. (Cheers).

"It is said, however, by a section of the public press that Mr. Tarte, the minister of public works, one of our French Canadian colleagues, opposed the sending of this contingent. Sir, I deny that Mr. Tarte did anything of the kind. (Cheers.)

If it were alleged against Mr. Tarte that he was of opinion for a while, or that he is even now of the opinion, that it would have been a proper and constitutional procedure to summon parliament before undertaking the expenditure which the expedition involved, I am not prepared to say that such a view on his part, or anybody's part, would have been unreasonable. I am prepared, however, to say that such a view is one which could properly and honestly be presented, and was entitled to a hearing.

"I was not myself in Ottawa at the time the question came up and was finally determined. I know there was practically little if any difference of opinion on the subject; but let us suppose that Mr. Tarte believed that parliament should be summoned. Was that a crime? Had he no right to his opinion? His opinion did not happen to prevail; but that is the case with all members of government at some time or other.

"We are all of us liable to entertain views which do not commend themselves to the judgment of the majority of our colleagues, and under our system of government we must yield those views, unless we regard them of supreme importance and inconsistent with the continuance of our relations with the government. Is the government to be blamed because they took one day, or two days, or even a week, to consider the various views entertained by individual members on a question involving an entire departure from all previous governmental policy? I think no ground for just complaint exists so long as such delay did not prejudice the interests that it was designed to protect, and so far as the object the government had in view was efficiently subserved. (Cheers).

"If Mr. Tarte's view was as is represented, and that view was right, and the government had overridden him, how long would it be before, in their calmer moments, the people would condemn the majority, and affirm the soundness of Mr. Tarte's opinion? But since those who find fault say he was wrong, surely they ought in all candor to commend what has actually been done, and to sustain and approve the action of the majority. (Hear, hear.)

"So far from doing this, it is first urged that Mr. Tarte was against sending a contingent until parliament was summoned for the purpose of approving such action, and although that view did not

prevail, the deliberate and persistent effort of the Conservative press and party has been to injure the government for the action taken.

"I put the question to this audience through you, sir, whether they believe a government ought to be so constituted as that every man, on every question, should see eye to eye with his colleagues? A government so constituted would not be worth its salt. You must have governments made up of different individuals, entertaining different views, representing different creeds and different nationalities. Even in this country the government must be so constituted, and it is well that it should be so. It affords the only opportunity which could be afforded for the presentation of different views on various questions. When an important question comes up the majority must decide, and the conclusion thus reached is all the sounder, and their action all the wiser, because they have not regarded it as being capable of being considered from one point of view, but from every point of view of which the matter is susceptible. As I have said, when these questions are thoroughly threshed out and considered in all their bearings by a cabinet of capable and responsible men, and the action which the government takes after such consideration is declared, that action may be properly taken as the judgment of the government, regardless of what individual opinions may have been expressed when the discussion was in progress. (Hear, hear.)

"There is but one course for a dissatisfied member of a cabinet to take under such circumstances. If he regards the decision as violating any principle so important that his remaining in the government would do violence to his notions of right, he withdraws from the administration and leaves the responsibility to be borne by those who are willing to bear it. If, on the other hand, the question does not present itself as of such magnitude as to justify him in severing his relations he remains, and in remaining he accepts the full measure of responsibility for the judgment of the majority. This, Mr. Chairman, is practical politics, and anything else is impractical politics. (Applause.)

"The endeavor to weaken the general position of the government in the country because one or more of its individual members in the early stages of a ques-

tion may have had views strongly adverse to the conclusion finally arrived at, is so palpable an attempt to make political capital that it seems to me it must fail to make any lasting impression upon the mind of any thoughtful man.

"Am I wrong in saying that there has been nothing but politics on the part of the opponents of the government from the very beginning of this agitation? (Hear, hear.) I deny that there has been any patriotism in it; that there has been any sincere desire at bottom to promote what they believed to be the interests of the country, to strengthen the imperial tie or to ensure the sympathetic and cordial co-operation of all the people of the country in the maintenance of British interests in this crisis. (Applause.)

"Happily, I believe, the cry has not only become stale, but has become nauseating in the better opinion of the people, and that there are few among the more judicious Conservatives who have not already realized that their leaders have overshot the mark in this transaction. (Cheers.) What, sir, would they do if they were to work out to its logical conclusion the idea they have been seeking to enforce upon the government and the country? They would stifle the free expression of opinion. They would absolutely muzzle individual judgment. They would have every public man, every government, answer to the clamor, the insensate and excitable cry of the newspaper press; and they would call upon the government to do this at a time when public feeling is aroused and in a state of unreasoning ferment. (Hear, hear.)

"How many of these politicians knew what was passing between the imperial and Canadian government? How many of them cared what was being done in that direction? Governments cannot get on the public platform and declare what their intentions are until they have matured them. They cannot make public the facts in their possession, and which may have come to them in confidential communications from another government.

"Yet the leader of the opposition, who has no responsibility, can resort to any device to strike a blow at the government in the hope that he may pierce their otherwise impregnable armour. He and his associates say to themselves: 'We will work upon the sentiment of the people of this country. We will make the people believe, if we can, that a portion

of the Liberal party are indifferent to imperial interests; that that portion is represented in the cabinet, and that it has paralyzed or hindered action by the government.' They say to themselves: 'This is the policy we will work out, and by this means we will do the government an injury we cannot otherwise accomplish.' Do you think I am unfairly stating the position in which the opposition has to-day placed itself? I think not. (Cheers.)

"I am happy to say that in my opinion they will fail of their purpose. Assuming that there were varying opinions upon the constitutional question represented in the cabinet, the fact remains that the contingent was sent and that it went in time. (Cheers.) Who sent it? The government of Canada. (Cheers.) And let me add, they would have sent another if the British government had so desired. (Renewed cheers.)

"Sir, there is one other feature of this business to which I must refer, and it is the most unfortunate of the whole—unfortunate, it appears to me, to the very party which has raised it and hopes to profit by it. It is the effort to create in the minds of the English speaking people of Canada the impression that because Mr. Tarte held to the view that parliament should be called together before action was taken in respect of this contingent, he must therefore be hostile to British interests, and in that hostility is representing the sentiments of his compatriots throughout Canada. That is where I think the foulness of this agitation is to be found. (Cheers.)

"What evidence is there to justify even the suspicion of such a thought? We have had tonight from the lips of my friend, Mr. Lemieux, a magnificent rejoinder. Cheers. He speaks for his people. He has spoken manfully. He has told you how the people of his great province feel towards Imperial interests, and how highly they value British connection. If he said aught else he would be traducing the loyal people of his province. (Cheers.) It is not a question of the success of one political party or another. It involves higher and weightier and more far reaching considerations. It touches the relations of the two great races of this portion of the North American continent, and it touches the future itself of the Dominion. Do these political agitators stop to think what may be the consequences of their conduct in this matter? I think

it may be said they do not. Sir, nothing could be more indefensible than the action they have taken.

"Supposing Mr. Tarte did hold and does hold the sentiments which they attribute to him. Supposing—although it is not even a supposable thing—for the purposes of argument that Mr. Tarte in such opinion represents the existing view in the great province of Quebec, is it well for Canada that prominence should be given to that fact for political purposes? (Hear, hear). I deny that the people of Quebec hold such views. (Cheers.) It is a slander upon them to affirm it. But to say it when it does not exist, to create an impression in the judgment of the world that nearly one half of the population of Canada—and that half of a different nationality from the majority—are not in sympathy with Britain, would not respond to a call for help, and would not unite in any action which was calculated to consolidate Imperial interests, must tend to injure and prevent the growth

of the sentiments which we all desire, and must ultimately bring about under existing conditions the ruin and destruction of our country. (Cheers). This is the view which, I regret to say, is the serious one in this whole controversy. It is lamentable that for mere party purposes there should be found a single public man, or a single public journal, capable of sounding a wrong note as to where stand the people of Canada when the interests of the empire are at stake. Sir, such efforts will not be successful. (Cheers.)

"I hope that people will forget the suspicions which have been cast upon the loyalty and patriotism of our brethren in Quebec, because we have a common interest; and I hope and pray that nothing will ever occur to cause a serious division between the two great races upon whose harmonious action must ever depend the future greatness and prosperity of Canada." (Great cheering).



